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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/C, INR, DRL, DS/IP/AF, DS/IP/ITA;
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SUBJECT: CHAD: UNDP CONVENES OPPOSITION AND AMBASSADORS

REF: A. A. NDJAMENA 421

[1](#)B. B. NDJAMENA 352

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: UNDP resrep invited hand-picked key opposition leaders for an unprecedented discussion March 16, with U.S. and French ambassadors present. CPDC members and Yorongar stated their willingness to engage in national dialogue but emphasized that the blame lay on President Deby for refusing to engage. They did not believe that a credible election was possible on May 3 and even indicated a willingness to join in toppling Deby by force of arms. The French ambassador countered pointed criticisms but avoided frontal pressure on the opposition. UNDP resrep said he chose to interpret the meeting positively and would meet Deby again, to try to explore his willingness to engage in dialogue. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Undaunted by the previous day's (1) revelation of a coup attempt or plot on March 14 and (2) communique from the opposition coalition CPDC stating its categorical unwillingness to participate in the May 3 election (ref A), Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program Kingsley Amaning March 16 convened an unprecedented meeting of the principal CPDC figures plus Ngarlejy Yorongar, with the French and American ambassadors, the German charge, and representatives of the European Union and African Union present. From the CPDC were Saleh Kebzabo, Lol Mahamat Choua, Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh, Salibou Garba, and representatives of Wadal Abdelkader Kamougue and Jean Bawoyeu Allingue (traveling). The tone remained civil throughout. A key object was to give the opposition the message -- including from French ambassador Jean-Pierre Bercot -- of respect and concern from the international community.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In a closed meeting among the UNDP and diplomats before the larger meeting, Bercot said he had met President Deby earlier in the day to discuss the coup attempt/plot and to indicate to him that this meeting with the opposition was to take place. Bercot claimed that he had suggested to Amaning that the meeting be organized. He said that he had agreed with Amaning that the UNDP and diplomats should not put pressure on the opposition to participate in the election but simply offer assistance.

14. (SBU) Amaning commenced the larger meeting with a review of agreed principles - stability, reduction of poverty, human rights, good governance -- and his hope to find a way to overcome the crisis of confidence separating the opposition and government in order to begin serious electoral reform.

15. (SBU) The opposition deferred to Saleh Kebzabo to make opening remarks. Kebzabo spoke calmly and coherently and not at undue length, more in sadness than anger. He reviewed the consistent efforts of the opposition over 13 years, since the national conference of 1993, to participate peaceably in a democratic process, but the regime had rigged every election.

Even after the utterly fraudulent June referendum, the opposition had met Deby in September and given him a detailed and achievable program for electoral reform. Deby had promised to respond but he had not done so, until now through UNDP when it was much too late to institute the reforms that would make the May 3 election legitimate. It was not necessary for the government to operate through UNDP; it needed only to pick up the telephone directly to the opposition. In November, Deby had added insult to injury by saying he knew all the opposition well, that he had "used" them all when they had variously served in his government; in fact, Kebzabo said, each had, in his own way, tried to serve his country, but ended up being dismissed as "used." Any effort and money that the international community offered to finance this election, or indeed any development effort in the country under this regime, would be a waste. Kebzabo said that he would not participate in the May 3 election. In fact, the CPDC would do everything in its power to try to ensure that the election did not take place. Lol Mahamat Choua endorsed Kebzabo's remarks, adding the CPDC would "use all of our force" to oppose the May 3 election.

16. (SBU) Yorongar, though not a member of CPDC, also endorsed Kebzabo's remarks. He handed out a letter to the UNDP and diplomats, specifying the requirement that the presidential election be delayed six months if electoral reform were to have any meaning. Unlike the CPDC speakers, Yorongar charged France with duping the opposition and using its army to save Deby, and he cited a Benin newspaper that had quoted Deby, "If I guarantee the interests of France and Libya, I will stay in power all my life." He dismissed the French concern about the "juridical void" that would be caused by extending Deby's term briefly, noting that there had been no objection to deferring constitutionally required legislative elections from 2001 to 2002. He concluded that if the only way to get rid of Deby were use of force, he would have to subscribe to it.

17. (SBU) Salibou Garba and Ibni Oumar Mahamat Saleh made brief remarks, emphasizing that there was not much point convening the CPDC about national dialogue, since it had been pressing for one without relent, with no response from the regime. It was inexcusable to allow Chad to follow the pattern of extended presidential terms as in Togo.

18. (SBU) Bercot spoke relatively briefly and temperately. France, he said, had files on all the persons in the room and knew well what roles they had played. He regretted having to take note of Kebzabo's and Yorongar's reference to use of force. He made no claim to being a constitutional expert but thought a juridical void was a serious matter. As for the claim that France was somehow seeking to ensure any party's hold on power, it was well to be aware of how little economic interest France now had in Chad. He might personally regret what happened in countries such as Togo, but the fact was that the international community had repeatedly swallowed extension of presidential terms, most recently in Uganda. The main point he wished to make was that France, both in its own capacity and as member of the European Union, sought to help Chad toward a peaceful transition, not as a go-between or facilitator, but as a neutral observer eager to assist Chad in promoting a democratic process.

19. (SBU) Amaning concluded the three-hour meeting saying that he was pleased to confirm the opposition's keenness to pursue dialogue toward genuine electoral reform and he would

now pursue the matter further with the president and government. (Note: An AFP report March 17, citing a CPDC spokesman, stated incorrectly that the "donors requested the opposition to participate in the May 3 election.")

¶10. (SBU) Comment: This assembly was noteworthy if for no other reason than that it took place at all. This was the first such gathering in our memory of key members of the opposition and representatives of the diplomatic corps, including the French ambassador, whose relations with some opposition members are distinctly frosty. Despite the meeting's positive atmospherics, prospects of getting the two sides to sit down for serious discussions about the elections are far from encouraging. End Comment.
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